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CURRENT OPINION

Mr. Wells's View of God

Mr. Wells's attempt to save God out of what he feels to be the débris and wreckage of the old creeds has called forth a multitude of reviews. It has held a prominent place in almost all the leading journals, the articles being written in many cases by outstanding modern thinkers. The writers, for the most part, assume an attitude of superiority and are inclined to be amused at the vision of Mr. Wells's discovery that religion may be a reality. There is generally an appreciation of the fact that out of the horrors of the war a deep religious experience has come to Mr. Wells, but almost nowhere is there recognition of the collateral fact that Mr. Wells is probably speaking to a vast audience looking for guidance in the midst of the world-tragedy. The one exception is the *Times Review of Books*, New York, which says:

Apparently Mr. Wells is voicing a very profound movement of the religious feeling which is stirring the heart of Great Britain as it has not been stirred, perhaps, in all its history. Evidence of this religious unrest and groping and of longing for spiritual consolation has come in many a book from England during the last two years. In a land where death is striking down fathers and husbands and sons and friends by the hundred thousands such a stirring was inevitable. "Our sons, who have shown us God," wrote Mr. Britling.

In the *Hibbert Journal* for July, the editor, Mr. L. P. Jacks, deals with Mr. Wells under the caption "The Modern Religion." He first attacks the use of the phrase "the modern religion" as appropriated by the author of *God the Invisible King*. Mr. Wells's leading idea is very old. Does he mean that it is the renaissance of an old religion, or does he imply that his teaching is the essence of all religion, both ancient and modern? To call it "the" modern religion suggests an exclusive right to the name and

anybody knows that there are a dozen religions more modern than his, and the keenest opposition to Mr. Wells will probably come, not from the old religions, but from these modern rivals. If Mr. Wells were only conscious of how old-fashioned he is, he would be less combative, less ungrateful, less irritating, less witty at other people's expense. There is hardly a line in Mr. Wells's description of God which is not the result of the Christian environment which produced Mr. Wells. He absolutely refuses to give the name of God to the Veiled Being, the Power behind nature, which, acting through its subordinate, the Life Force, becomes self-conscious in man. After reading the book through carefully twice, Mr. Jacks feels much more interested in the Veiled Being than in Mr. Wells's somewhat "parochial God." The latter is only interesting because of his connection with the mysterious Veiled Being. "It is very ungrateful of Mr. Wells to turn his back squarely upon the real hero of the piece."

Mr. Wells tells us that the modern religion does not argue about God but simply relates, since it is based entirely on experience. He nevertheless plays with the dangerous terms "finite" and "infinite," emphatically declaring that God is finite; but he does not tell us how "finite." "Finite" may mean as big as you please or as little, as powerful as you please or as feeble, as good as you please or as bad. It may be only the infinite in disguise. Mr. Wells tells us God will never end—a strange quality for a finite deity. And is he "arguing" now or "relating"? Where in his "experience" did he get the knowledge that God would never end? The book is a document of great value as a personal confession, but it is bad history and bad philosophy; moreover, it is arrogant, dogmatic, and lacking in catholicity.

It is probable that nobody can write a book about God without doing violence to something essential to the divine nature. He is seen only in secret. Mr. Wells gives two definite impressions—that he has found God or rather that God has found him and that he is philosophically all astray in the account he gives of the Divine Being.

Mr. Wells's discovery of God was preceded by another discovery—that of the incompleteness and mass of imperfections in which Nature and the natural man are alike involved. He saw also that so long as the natural man is unredeemed, science, culture, education, social reform and all the rest are quite powerless to alter these conditions or to save us from their miseries. He saw this as Gotama saw it, as St. Paul saw it, as Dante saw it, as Schopenhauer saw it, as Nietzsche saw it, as Royce saw it, as any Salvationist sees it. Then comes the discovery of God—the consciousness of the presence of another will, not his own, not the "collective mind" of the community nor any other hollow abstraction of that kind. God declares his presence in the hearts of his servants and there is the end of the "proof" of it.

Professor Dewey has an article, "H. G. Wells, Theological Assembler," in the July number of the *Seven Arts*, which is of more than usual interest because it gives a specialist's interpretation of the psychology of the religious experience behind *God the Invisible King*. Professor Dewey sees in Wells's genius for the fantastic a belief that the other side of things is not only interesting but supernatural. He is amused at the ease with which Wells assumes that the modern religion is already established and forthwith sets out eloquently to unfold the dark and unsolved uncertainties of life; at the inconsistencies and awkwardness of Wells's work as an "assembler"; at the enthusiasm which Wells displays over his discovery of ideas that were old centuries ago; at the naïve assumption that traditional theology was not an assembling and co-ordination of what was current in the days of its origin. "We would intimate

to Mr. Wells that in their own days various Councils, Synods, and Assemblies were also 'some' assemblers."

Mr. Wells shows that the evangelical mind is far more thoroughly ingrained than that of either orthodoxy or puritanism. In his section on the rule of life he has the whole paraphernalia of evangelical efficiency. Why quarrel with Brother Sunday because he still speaks a dialect which is going out of fashion among the cultured? From multitudes of evangelical pulpits in this country will come sermons welcoming Mr. Wells into the fold.

Dewey could make nothing of Wells until he came upon that section of the book dealing with benevolent atheists. The difficulty with the atheist, in Wells's opinion, is that he stands alone; he has no one to whom he can give himself. The only escape then for Wells from an unrelieved egoism is recourse to a big Alter Ego upon whom is bestowed the name of God. This suggested to Dewey the psychological mechanism called "projection." When an individual finds a conflict in himself which is offensive and with which he cannot successfully cope directly he projects it into or upon another personality and then finds rest. Uneasy and tortured egoism, finding no rest in itself for itself, creates a huge Ego, which though finite and although not a creator of worlds, is still huge enough to be our king, leader, and helper.

In the November number of the *Atlantic Monthly* Mr. Bernard Iddings Bell professes to report a discussion of Mr. Wells's book at a Chicago club. There is expressed the inevitable amusement at the enthusiasm over new-old ideas, a criticism of the spirit of prejudice and the lack of scientific treatment of history, when a priest undertakes to write out as follows his interpretation of Mr. Wells. Human beings have held three ideas of God: (1) The Veiled Being, the Creator, a God of law, a Deity of inflexible justice to be feared and adored if he is to

be worshipped at all; (2) God as Leader and Guide, the King to whom we must be loyal; (3) God as sustaining, comforting, enveloping strength. The early Christian church felt that all these things were true. They could not reconcile them, but believing them clung to them, and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed is the result. Their central idea was that the Invisible King had become visible in the Nazarene Peasant. But Jesus spoke of a Father and a Comforter; these matched the idea of a Creator God and the mystical idea of God. These three the Nicene theology includes under the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Calvin overemphasized the stern Deity and made a caricature of God. It is against this type of theology that Wells is reacting so violently and not against the balanced creed of Nicaea. Overemphasis on the idea of God as expressed in the mystical form of Holy Spirit was made by the Friends, the Unitarians, the American Transcendentalists, and the Christian Scientists. This is just as lopsided as the theology of Calvin. As Calvinism made God a brute of steel, so this latter type makes God a feather bed. He fails to fit in with life's severities. These two overemphases have practically ruined respect for Christianity in Protestant countries. The world rejected both interpretations and was just happily materialistic. But with the war, materialism as a philosophy broke down. In his time of need, Mr. Wells has simply found the long-neglected Son of the Nicene theology. He has gone back to the old concept of God as leader and king of the orthodox faith. One thing is sure—those who sympathetically repeat the Nicene creed will understand Mr. Wells better than the other people who read his book.

Changing Christianity

Help for the Christian church in the great and difficult problem of adjustment to new world-conditions is being suggested

from the most unexpected quarters. "Religion under Repair" is the subject of an article by A. P. Sinnett in the *Nineteenth Century and After* for September. A pathetic and bitter attack upon the church as deserted and messageless, which appeared in the *Times*, moves him to suggest with glowing enthusiasm and in perfervid language the "higher occultism" as the guide for the shepherdless sheep. Is the teaching of the church just dust and litter of the past? Then let the people study the occult science and the future glows with hope. Do the leaders of the church talk only pious nonsense? Then the study of "occult chemistry" may open the way to a view of the universe which shall be a revelation and a "discovery" to the lay mind. Like a glowing mystic, greedy for vast imaginative dreams, Mr. Sinnett preaches the occult gospel as the way in which at last science and religion may find their old hostility subdued, and all people, united in harmony, will follow the truth as the great, evolving solar system rolls on to the happier future.

Lady Katherine F. Stuart, in the *Asiatic Review* for October, presents the "Twentieth Century Religion." She sees that there is a general note of uncertainty about religion under the assault of science, church dissension, and the failure of priest and pastor to grip the public mind. Many have become avowed materialists, claiming that religion has been the cause of feuds, wars, and arrested mental and material development. "Away with religion," they say; "let us establish instead humanitarianism and a code of ethics." But the materialist now sees that there must be idealism and even a Deity, since our material civilization, begun in self-sufficiency, has ended in Armageddon.

Lady Stuart brings advice from the East and suggests that Hinduism may give us sane and wholesome guidance. The East knows how to combine art, philosophy, and science with religion into one spiritual

culture. In the West religion has antagonized science while art and philosophy have drawn off to independent realms. The West is suffering from the delusion that religion is a *belief*, but when religion, art, science, and philosophy all unite to interpret, correlate, and corroborate one another, as they do in Hinduism, we then perceive that religion is a *realization*. How much realization of God is there in Christendom at the present time? Yet these countries send missionaries to "heathen" India. The idols of wealth, fame, and popularity are too often the real gods of the West, but in India "there is only one idol, the idol of God"; so Hinduism teaches. If religion is a realization and not a belief, then surely my brother has every right to realize God as he pleases. Only one thing would seem to be unpardonable—that a man or nation should ignore the Lover of all beings. Once more, when tolerance has set the crown upon the brow of Truth, all creeds and classes can unite to serve the next generation. The earth is entailed property—it belongs to the child of the future.

In a lengthy article, entitled "The Moralization of Religion," appearing in the *London Quarterly Review* for October, Principal P. T. Forsyth traces five successive stages through which traditional Christianity has passed during the last century. First there was the effort to rationalize the faith. Next came the spiritualizing of religion as shown in the evangelical and sacramentarian movements, which in places degenerated into mysticism and occultism. The third step was the humanizing of religion, which found voice in the great poets. The humanitarian scientist strives to psychologize religion. The next great movement was the effort to socialize religion which is evident in the various social service organizations and the schemes of Christian socialism. Now, at last, working through all these but taking its own form, comes the moralization of religion. This movement

means the tendency to recognize as the principle of all Christian formations and reformations that "Kingdom of God" which dominated Christ in life and death. The moral and not the rational is the real. It makes the moral experience the ruling feature of Christianity as the religion of moral redemption. This is the New Evangelicalism.

Émile Boutroux has recently made an appeal for "Liberty of Conscience" to the religious forces of his beloved France and his article has been copied by the *International Journal of Ethics* as well as by the *London Quarterly Review*, both October numbers. He thinks that one lesson stands out clearly from the trial through which we are passing: the necessity of extirpating from our society religious intolerance, the scourge which has been so productive of barren strife. Frenchmen in the face of a common duty are united in thought, heart, and will. Must they return after the war to the old antagonisms?

The external powers have persistently been in conflict with liberty of conscience. Even science, by narrowing the field of the unknown, is limiting the place of freedom of individual opinion. These external powers have used various means of mastery. The most ancient and simplest has been persecution. But conscience is a spiritual thing and all force breaks down before it. The whole history of persecution shows the futility of force. Moreover, force does not solve the problems in which conscience is engaged. A second method of control has been compromise—the external powers make a treaty of peace with the spiritual. The fallacy of this solution lies in the fact that the external world and the world of conscience are not separate. Man is a whole whose elements are inseparable. Neither body nor soul can be separated nor does conscience exist apart. Every idea begins an action: every action manifests an idea. Liberty of conscience means

effort, even strife, in the task of modifying the world to its ideal. We have to face the truth fearlessly—between the individual soul and the community all real and lasting peace is impossible unless, amid all differences in principle and point of view, human beings have mutual understanding and esteem.

This has a bearing on the relations of science and religion. When religion and science consider each other only from without they are led to distrust each other or even to regard each other as irreconcilable enemies, but when they endeavor to understand each other in spirit and truth they see that their coexistence is natural and necessary and that they can and ought to render mutual services.

The minimum of mutual human obligation is tolerance. To tolerance must be added, however, respect. "Conscience, that secret and living communion with the ideal, is essentially the power to confront material force by obeying moral laws: this very character confers on it a positive dignity and makes it something sacred to every intelligent being." Since we are all struggling as brothers in the effort to fathom the divine perfection, we owe to each other not only tolerance and respect but sympathy and friendship. Cordial collaboration on the part of all who are devoted to virtue and to their country, however different their beliefs, is the duty our reason dictates. This, too, will be the blessing left to us by the immense sacrifices, the deeds of truest devotion, and the superhuman efforts made in common, without respect of rank or opinion, by the peoples of the warring world.

The Formula for Peace

In the *Atlantic Monthly* for December, Courtenay de Kalb lays down the basis for an enduring peace. He argues that all wars are grounded on the fundamental life-needs and are economic; that the pan-Germanic idea of Hegel would mean the beginning of the decline of mankind. There is need of many nations. By multiplying the units the power of variation and growth is also multiplied and the progress of the world assured. The wills and ambitions of divers peoples oppose the weak surrender of initiative that would impede the cultural development of the human race were the world reduced to a single civic organism. The plan of a League of Nations is in the line of this unification and denationalization. To carry it out means the sinking of national aspirations in the will of a controlling central authority, which logically means the supremacy of the most aggressive of the represented groups. There is something better than this which will preserve the natural tendencies to intellectual growth in the race without the military menace. That is to introduce the principle of natural trade by taking steps to eliminate the fostering devices on which national aggrandizement depends; strip off the tariff, ship-subsidies, bounties, and all the cruder forms of industrial parentalism. This would go far toward the organization of the sisterhood of nations on a true competitive basis of relative inherent skill, knowledge, and ability. In this way lies the open road to peace and progress. We must take either this road or the alternative of trade-war hand in hand with Mars.